

BELMONT WARRANT COMMITTEE FY08 MEETING MINUTES
FINAL
MAY 28, 2008, 7:30 P.M.
CHENERY MIDDLE SCHOOL COMMUNITY ROOM

Present: Chair Curtis; Members Allison, Brusch, Callanan, Epstein, Heigham, Hofmann, Jones, Lynch, McLaughlin, Paolillo, and Widmer; School Committee Chair Bowe

Town Treasurer Carman; Town Accountant Hagg

Absent: BOS Chair Firenze; Members: Oates and White

The meeting was called to order at 7:32 pm by Chair Curtis.

Chair Curtis began the meeting by turning to the discussion of next year's (FY10) budget schedule.

FY10 Budget Calendar

Chair Curtis requested that Member Brusch update the WC on a proposed budget calendar schedule. Member Brusch: Both the town and school budgets could be presented in December (the school's budget was not prepared in December this past year). We could then resurrect the practice of holding budget hearings in January. Town Meeting members would be invited to these hearings. Member Widmer: Given the override discussions that will take place next year, we will need to present two budgets simultaneously - a non-override and an override budget. Brusch agreed that the WC will need to discuss two budgets whenever an override is possible. Member McLaughlin requested that the town and school budget numbers be agreed upon early in the process. Chair Curtis: The WC can define the numbers for the town and school by using the same percentage split that was used for FY09 and have it as a starting point for FY10. Regarding revenue, Curtis asked Town Accountant Hagg when a realistic estimate would be known. Hagg: 78% of revenues comes from real estate taxes and we can make a good estimate by October. The last \$100-200K is unknown (for a while). [Barbara - is this accurate?]

Chair Curtis: The WC will provide budget numbers by Oct. 1 using known/estimated revenues. We will ask the department heads for their best budget by mid December. The first budget will be based on available revenue numbers, the second will be "level service," and the third will be using override numbers. Override numbers, as well as what constitutes a level service budget, will be defined in the course of our discussions.

Member Allison offered an orthogonal point, stating that she is not persuaded an override would pass, therefore, she asked: what is the social contract we will write with the voters to get them to support a structural override? The WC will need to think about a revenue-driven budget. This will be a requirement to getting a good outcome out of the process.

Member Paolillo: Regarding the "level service" question, the line moves every year. Are we defining it as "nothing new"? Where does this leave the FY09 elimination of trees and street lights? The subcommittees, he continued, can work through what are "core services" and help define what services are not sustainable without an override. Chair Curtis: The baseline for a level service budget is to look at what a department had last year for people and programs. I would like to have the available revenue budgets and a level service budget by mid December. We can take more time to sort out the structural override timeline and look at a three-year plan, a five-year plan, etc.

Summer Warrant Committee Projects

[Please see separate handout (attachment) which summarizes this section.]

Chair Curtis turned the WC's attention to a handout created by Town Accountant Hagg that summarized the WC Summer Projects list that was generated at the May 14th meeting. Chair Curtis said he wanted to focus on what's important to the budget process for next year. Member Widmer said he would like to focus on what the WC needs to do to persuade voters about how the WC has reined in costs. The WC should also look at what needs to be done to hold down the rate of growth spending. These conversations will organize the WC's work and will set the direction to make a difference for the public - in other words, it helps to establish the social contract that Member Allison referred to.

Member Epstein: It's been a challenge to figure out what exactly is in the budget. Should it be sorted from biggest to smallest items or from what's controllable to what's not controllable? I would like to be able to manipulate the budget in a more meaningful way, perhaps electronically. Town Accountant Hagg said she could send out a one-page spreadsheet which breaks the budget down by departments into separate sections: salary, benefits, utilities, capital items, debt, etc.

Member Brusch: I am planning to obtain the budgets (and compare them) from Winchester, Needham, Lexington, and Arlington. I want to see what they are spending their money on and will perhaps see what their budget process is as well. Member Allison: Let's compare municipal budgets with those towns who are doing the best possible job as opposed to those towns who just happen to be next door to Belmont. Brusch added that a MEGA meeting will need to be scheduled for June or September. The feasibility studies are done and we will know about the Wellington by July 28th. There is a meeting with the BOS on June 16th to discuss the capital budget process and the orphan items (technology, for example).

Minutes of Meetings, 4/23/2008 & 5/14/2008 (Lisa), 4/28/2008 & 4/30/2008 (Barbara)

The minutes of the above meetings were approved, after adjustments made to the minutes of 4/23 and 4/28.

Other

At the WC's next meeting (June 18th), Kevin Looney will discuss the reserve fund transfer (snow transfer) and the summer projects list and assignments will be revisited.

Member Heigham moved that the WC adjourn at 8:53 pm.